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ABSTRACT

The awakening of public interest in curriculum has come at a time when, within the education profession, the conventional wisdom about teaching and learning has itself undergone a major transformation. New Constructivist theories of knowing have emphasized the social nature of the construction of knowledge: students learn by "putting it into words" or by building representations of the various symbolic systems (language, the arts, mathematics, myth) humankind has evolved to articulate ways of knowing. The recent history of the teaching of writing is typical of the ways that constructivist theories have evolved in a variety of educational contexts. The view emerging in research and practice emphasizes writing as a problem-solving activity guided by linguistic and cognitive strategies or "processes." As process-oriented instruction becomes the conventional wisdom, however, its limitations become more evident and recent commentators have sought to re-embed writing in its social contexts. Curriculum should provide a conversational space or domain within which students can engage new subject matter. This notion of curriculum has obvious ties to language (which firmly anchors it in contemporary theories of knowing and being) and is socially and culturally situated. An effective curriculum requires a constructivist pedagogy--one in which the roles of the teacher and learner are transformed to support the construction of meaning, rather than the transmission of knowledge. It is ultimately the teacher, in the day-to-day interaction with students, who enables them to construct meaning. (Contains 54 references.) (SAM)

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Beyond the Lesson: Reconstruing Curriculum as a Domain for Culturally Significant Conversations

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Introduction

The past few years have seen an unprecedented awakening of public interest in issues of curriculum. Commentators have attacked the school and college curriculum for lack of depth and rigor, for abandoning the Western heritage, for failing to develop basic skills, and for ignoring the diversity of America's cultural heritage, privileging a white, male, Eurocentric tradition.

This awakening of public interest in curriculum has come at a time when, within the education profession, the conventional wisdom about effective teaching and learning has itself undergone a major transformation. Older, positivistic notions of knowledge as reflections of fundamental truths about the world have been gradually replaced with newer frameworks that acknowledge the situated nature of what we know: Knowledge itself is redefined as a social construction that exists only in relation to tacitly held ways of knowing.

This new view of knowledge has profound implications for teaching and learning, implications that are still being worked out in the educational system as a whole. Schools as we know them have been structured to effectively transmit an objectifiable body of knowledge to new generations. Teachers and textbooks present what is known; students memorize and recite; and when students have learned the basics, the more academically inclined are invited to continue to the "higher" studies in which they may eventually make their own contributions to knowledge. Curriculum, in such a system, becomes the specification of what is to be learned, a codification of existing knowledge parsed for effective teaching into elaborate scope and sequence charts. These in turn serve as guidelines for textbook construction and lesson planning.

As the emphasis in philosophy has shifted away from such positivistic views of knowledge, the emphasis in instructional theory has shifted toward processes of teaching and learning. Rather than convey bodies of knowledge, teachers have been asked to help students "construct meaning," to act and do, rather than to listen and repeat. A whole new vocabulary has developed for talking about instruction, highlighting concepts such as "process" (Emig, 1971), "problem solving" (Flower & Hayes, 1981), "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1978; Cazden, 1979; Applebee & Langer, 1983), "reciprocal teaching" (Palinscar & Brown, 1984), "activity theory" (Leont'ev, 1981), and "proleptic instruction" (Rogoff & Gardner, 1984). Such concepts have led to a transformation in the ways we think about teaching and learning, requiring a new, "uncommon sense" (Mayher

1990) to guide instruction.

Educators embracing such concepts (and the constructivist theories of knowing they reflect) have focused more on the nature of individual learning activities than on the broader educational, social, and cultural context in which that learning is ultimately and intimately embedded. The result, I will argue, has been a failure to conceptualize a program of study that is constructivist in orientation, and yet that offers coherence and consistency over long periods of time--units or semesters or even the K-12 sequence of teaching and learning.

Constructivist theories of knowing have emphasized the social nature of the construction of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967): We learn by "putting it into words" or, more generally, by building representations of the world through the various symbolic systems that humankind has evolved (language, the arts, mathematics, myth, religion; see Cassirer, 1944; Langer, 1969). This putting into words takes place on many levels, from the infant learning to talk (and in the process "learning how to mean" as Halliday, 1977, has described it) to the philosopher articulating a theory of knowing (Polanyi, 1962), the artist painting within or against a tradition (Gombrich, 1968), or the scientist revolutionizing a scientific discipline (Kuhn, 1970). Each of these enterprises is characteristically social in nature: The words that are used, what counts as knowing and doing, are shaped by what other individuals have said and done, by the conversations that have gone before. This is the irreducible nature of tradition as it constitutes the present matrix out of which we act. Infants speak the language of their parents; artists express their visions through the techniques they choose to use or violate; scientists address the issues of their discipline. It is not simply that if they don't, they will not be understood; more fundamentally, the past provides the very means for acting in the present, the ways of defining problems and understanding the world. Each of us in our personal, communal, and professional lives participates in ongoing social and cultural conversations most of whose participants are unseen, and whose endpoints are beyond the horizon of individual lives.

This notion of socially and culturally significant conversations provides a starting point for reconceiving issues of curriculum. Rather than approaching curriculum as bodies of objective knowledge or discrete skills to be imparted, we can view it as a selection of elements (e.g., books, concepts, activities) that form a conversational domain within larger, culturally constituted and socially significant discourses (Brodkey, 1987, 1992)--language, history, literature, science, the arts--into which a community at a given point in time wants its students to be able to enter. Teaching and learning, then, take the form of participation in culturally significant conversations: As students learn to act within the curricular domain, they simultaneously learn the tacit, socially constituted conventions that give shape and structure to the larger realms of discourse. Viewing curriculum in this way provides quite a different perspective on such traditional questions as sequence and coverage, as well as a framework that articulates more comfortably with emerging constructivist-oriented instructional approaches.

The argument will begin by exploring recent developments in the teaching and learning of English as a first language and the tensions introduced with conventional models of the curriculum; I will then elaborate upon the notion of curriculum as a conversational domain as a way to address some of those tensions. Although the argument will be grounded in recent

developments in the teaching and learning of English language arts, the view of curriculum that emerges generalizes directly to other subject areas.[1]

Constructivism in Educational Theory and Practice: The Case of Writing Instruction

The recent history of the teaching of writing is typical of the ways that constructivist theories have evolved in a variety of educational contexts. The evolution has been marked by separate stages of focus on a) the writer in isolation, b) teaching practices consistent with what writers do, c) the intersection between teaching practice and student learning, and d) the social and cultural context within which writing is embedded.

Traditional approaches to writing instruction treated writing (or "composition") as a body of knowledge about the structure of texts. This knowledge existed at several different levels, including the mechanics of punctuation and spelling, the rules of grammar and syntax, and the logic or structure underlying larger units of text. In classical rhetoric, this knowledge of completed text was accompanied by knowledge of how to explore a topic in order to develop a full range of appropriate arguments and evidence. These topoi offered a set of procedures appropriate to composition, but they differed from later concerns with procedures in that they were preliminary to rather than part of the performance that would follow. The rules of invention, for example, were at least as schematic as they were procedural, proffering a full (rather than merely a strategic) mapping of the grounds of argument.

Given a definition of writing as a body of knowledge, writing instruction focused on acquisition of that knowledge. At various points in history that instruction included memorization of rules, analysis of models exemplifying those rules, memorization of valued texts, and drill and practice in which the rules could be applied in highly focused contexts. (All of these historical approaches have their descendants in classroom practices today.) Only at times did writing instruction include the creation of original texts, since such texts were treated as the relatively trivial transcription of what a writer wanted to say, following the rules of good form. Poor writing in such contexts was the result of lack of knowledge-- either of what one purported to be discussing or of the rules of good writing. Neither of these deficiencies was likely to be much helped by further muddling around in one's ignorance; the cure for lack of knowledge was to acquire the knowledge that was lacking, not necessarily to write.

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the perception that writing was a body of knowledge was seriously eroded. Advances in linguistics, in particular the rapid movement from structural to transformational grammars (Chomsky, 1957), destroyed teachers' faith in grammatical knowledge as codified in school grammars. Large scale efforts to codify spelling rules (Hanna, Hodges, & Rudorf, 1966) failed to achieve a parsimonious description of the spelling system and highlighted the inadequacies of commonly taught maxims. And examinations

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[1]This is particularly true if we generalize the notion of a "domain for conversational action" to a larger set of culturally constituted "domains for action" that may be nonverbal and conversational only in a metaphoric sense.

of published writing challenged the accuracy of widely-taught rules of text structure, such as the importance of beginning each paragraph with a topic sentence (Braddock, 1974) or the ubiquity of paragraph structures codified in composition textbooks (Meade & Ellis, 1970). If knowledge about writing, as codified in prescriptive rules, was so inaccurate or unspecifiable, how was writing to be taught?

Even as the traditional view of writing as a body of codified knowledge was being eroded, an alternative view was emerging in research and practice. This view emphasized writing as a problem-solving activity guided by linguistic and cognitive strategies or "processes." Emig's (1971) study of the composing processes of twelfth grade students is generally cited to mark the beginning of serious writing research in this tradition. Examining the think-aloud protocols of case study students as they completed a series of writing tasks, Emig illustrated how complex and evolutionary the act of writing actually was, and how distant from the traditional model of transcription of a fully developed set of ideas following prescriptive rules of form and mechanics.

In the years that followed the publication of Emig's work, the emphasis in writing research shifted dramatically toward detailed examinations of the writing processes of writers of all ages and levels of expertise. (For summaries of the research, see Hillocks, 1986.)

Almost simultaneously with research into how individual writers completed writing tasks, teachers began to develop methods of process-oriented writing instruction. Such instruction found different realizations in different classrooms, but sought to develop students' cognitive and linguistic strategies either explicitly by direct instruction or implicitly by providing writing contexts that would be more compatible with "natural" language learning and language use. Such classrooms were characterized by a decomposition of writing tasks into prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing; an emphasis on multiple drafts; use of small groups for problem solving and for peer response to student work; and deferment of evaluation to the end of an extended writing project.

As process-oriented instruction became the conventional wisdom, the limitations of the cognitive frameworks from which it evolved became more evident. Recent commentators have sought to re-embed writing in its social contexts, emphasizing either the social nature of the learning process itself or the social nature of the act of writing. The two critiques have led in different but not incompatible directions. The first has tended to focus on social learning processes, in particular the social-psychological theories of the Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (1962) and his students. The second has focused on the extent to which writing reflects and is determined by social and cultural codes--including power relations and prejudices--which should be met with resistance rather than submission (Brodkey, 1992; Minnich, 1990).

As process-oriented research and practice have evolved in the teaching of writing, a variety of models and principles have been developed to illustrate and characterize effective activities. Abundant resources are now available for teachers of writing who wish to adopt a more constructivist approach to writing instruction; these resources often provide sample lessons and discuss the frameworks that guided their construction (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983;

Kirby & Liner, 1981;). They have been singularly lacking, however, in attention to curriculum beyond the level of the individual writing activity and the reconstitution of the classroom environment around workshop or laboratory metaphors.

The Need for A New Conception of Curriculum

The spread of process-oriented approaches to the teaching of writing has been paralleled by similar trends in the teaching of other aspects of the language arts (in particular reading, and more recently literature), as well as by trends in fields as diverse as science and history. As such approaches have become more widespread, however, their neglect of issues of curriculum has created a new set of problems. There is an increasingly obvious tension between the conception of instructional activities embodied in such approaches and the now-traditional models of curriculum planning which structure district curriculum guides, state guidelines, and evaluation criteria for the adoption of textbooks. (On the fundamental nature of the changes involved, see Lester & Onore, 1990.)

Again, attempts at curriculum development within the English language arts will illustrate the problem. Prevailing curriculum frameworks tend to emphasize lists of skills to be learned, sometimes orchestrated into elaborate scope-and-sequence charts, objectives to be attained (sometimes taking the form of behavioral objectives, sometimes cast more broadly), or lists of books to be covered at a given grade. Historically, these frameworks have been grounded in positivist conceptions of knowledge; they have usually taken the form of inventories of needed life-skills, taxonomic analyses of the content of central academic disciplines, or developmental analyses of the growth of students' knowledge. Many reflect a behaviorist paradigm of practice and reinforcement, often paralleled by task analysis and a consequent emphasis on the introduction and coordination of subskills felt to contribute to complex learning. None of these approaches sits in comfortable relationship to a constructivist framework, primarily because each ultimately turns the curriculum into a body of knowledge and skills that must be imparted. Such a vision trivializes the role of the learner as an active participant in a socially constructed world, and distorts the ways that skills develop in the process of mastering complex tasks.

The tensions between constructivist theories of learning and positivistic conceptions of knowledge have had a variety of negative consequences. One set of tensions has been evident in recent attempts to provide summative statements about appropriate curricula. Two examples are worth considering. The first is E.D. Hirsch's extended effort to justify and define a curriculum based on a set of culturally important vocabulary items that form an essential background of prior knowledge for students who are to participate successfully in the culture. The intellectual groundwork for Hirsch's (1987) effort was laid out in his bestselling book, Cultural Literacy, followed by a dictionary of cultural literacy and an effort to develop grade-level curricula and accompanying tests. Hirsch's effort is not different in kind from earlier attempts to define a curriculum in terms of "what should be known" (e.g., Adler's [1940] great books or Bobbitt's [1924] minimal essentials), though he offers a new base for his efforts in recent studies of the

importance of prior knowledge to reading comprehension. What is different about Hirsch's effort is the vituperative reaction it has generated in many corners of the academic community.

This reaction has several causes, but the most important is that Hirsch offers a vision of curriculum that is incompatible with constructivist approaches to learning. (Interestingly, much of Hirsch's analysis of what should be learned is grounded in constructivist research in reading comprehension; it is his pedagogy rather than his scholarship that relies upon positivistic prescriptions of what should be known.) His challenge is not just to what schools are trying to teach, but to the whole enterprise of redefining what counts as knowing. Hirsch's curriculum is positivist in the most traditional sense, focusing on a body of knowledge that must be transmitted by schools and received by students. To the extent that this curriculum is embraced by teachers or the general public, it militates against more fundamental changes in what counts as knowing and doing. (The details of this curriculum also conjure up visions of cultural imperialism grounded in white male Eurocentric traditions--which also has raised the level of anger.) Giroux (1992) is typical when he accuses Hirsch among others of launching

> a dangerous attack on some of the most basic aspects of democratic public life and the social, moral, and political obligations of responsible, critical citizens. What has been valorized in this language is, in part, a view of schooling based on a celebration of cultural uniformity, a rigid view of authority, an uncritical support for remaking school curricula in the interest of labor-market imperatives, and a return to the old transmission model of teaching. (p. 123)

The attack distorts Hirsch's proposals and goals, but reflects the degree of threat many have seen in his program. Part of the threat is precisely that Hirsch is so successful at doing what he does, offering the possibility of a cumulative, sequential approach to "cultural literacy" at a time when many are arguing that schools are failing and that new approaches are needed.

The second example to consider comes from the other end of the philosophical and pedagogical spectrum. In 1987, as Hirsch's book was beginning to spark debate, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Modern Language Association, and a variety of other organizations interested in the teaching of English joined in a summer conference to rethink the curriculum in English. Bringing together 50 teachers and scholars at elementary, secondary, and college levels, the Coalition Conference sought to forge a consensus about the English curriculum.

The documents that resulted reflect the incompleteness of the constructivist agenda in education (Elbow, 1990; Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1989). Agreement is clearest at the level of broad and ultimately meaningless assertions about the nature of learning (e.g., learning "inevitably unites skills and content in a dynamic process of practice and assimilation," Lloyd-Jones & Lundsford, 1989) and at the level of the individual lesson. There is nothing in the reports, however, to give shape and form to a curriculum. Explicitly rejecting prescriptive "lists" of books to read or skills to learn, the Coalition Conference was left with little to offer in its place. Arguing that curriculum would necessarily be local, the reports were relegated to providing vignettes of successful practice. And by their nature, such vignettes are unhelpful in conceptualizing the curriculum as a whole. Partly as a result, if Hirsch's proposals have triggered

vituperative debate, the reports from the Coalition Conference have largely been ignored.

An effective curriculum does require guiding principles, whether they take the form of Hirsch's lists of the necessary ingredients for cultural literacy or reflect an alternative framework for making decisions about what to teach when. Experienced teachers operate out of such frameworks, reflected in their tacit sense of what is important, what is less so, and of how to create a sense of unity and coherence across a semester or a year. Without well-articulated guidelines for the curriculum, however, what they teach remains largely unexamined, and thus unavailable for sharing with less experienced teachers, or for explaining and if need be defending the program to a public increasingly concerned about the conduct of schooling. In this context the frequent and well-intentioned admonition to rely upon the professional judgment of teachers is inherently self-destructive, for it is the essence of professional judgment to be able to articulate and defend professional decisions upon a base of knowledge and experience. When judgment remains unexamined, it loses status and authority, retreating to the level of what North (1987) has deemed "lore."

Again, the history of the teaching of writing offers an instructive example. One of the longest-running disagreements in the field as a whole has focused on the teaching of the rules of traditional school grammar. Since the turn of the century, researchers have argued that such instruction is ineffective, with no discernable relationship to improvements in students' writing abilities. As the century has progressed, the research mustered to prove this point to recalcitrant teachers has become increasingly sophisticated, but it has had seemingly little effect on teaching practice (see Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Shorer, 1963; Hillocks, 1986).

Among researchers, this history is often viewed as a frustrating example of teachers' lack of knowledge of research, and each new study is begun in the hope of finally being able to offer evidence convincing enough to lead teachers to reject this outmoded form of instruction. Yet while researchers' frustration is real enough, the research in this tradition has in large part focused on the wrong issue. Teachers do not continue to teach grammar because they do not believe the research--the assumption that has driven researchers to ever-more-sophisticated studies; they teach it because it offers a predictable and well-articulated curriculum that is clearly related to the subject of English (McEvoy, 1984). What research on grammar instruction has not offered is an alternative curriculum that is equally well-structured. (The one exception, sentence-combining practice, is the exception that proves the point: Sentence combining is easily packaged into structured materials and is widely used, even though the research base out of which it was developed is ultimately equivocal about its benefits.)

McEvoy's case studies of the role of formal grammar instruction in individual teachers' classrooms show the grammar curriculum playing two important roles. One role is developmentally related to learning to teach: For beginning teachers, the grammar curriculum provides scaffolding that they can rely upon early in their development as teachers. For these teachers, the formal teaching of grammar is often something they move beyond as their comfort in the classroom grows, and they are able to develop their own alternative curriculum in literature and writing. The second role is related to personality and teaching style: For some teachers, abandoning grammar instruction threatens their sense of authority and their need for predictable

structure within their classrooms. Further research on the relationship of grammar instruction to the development of writing ability is simply irrelevant to these concerns.

Both cases are instructive, for they imply that the notion of curriculum is not an artificial one; teachers' sense of curriculum plays an important role in the ways they provide order and coherence to their lives in classrooms. When we make suggestions for educational reform that involve removing existing curricular structures, it behooves us to offer effective alternatives.

Curriculum as a Conversational Domain

The notion of a conversational domain has a number of advantages as a vehicle for thinking about curriculum. One is its obvious ties to language, and thus to the many discussions of language that have played a central role in the evolution of constructivist approaches in philosophy and in education. Timothy Crusius (1991), in his introduction to philosophical hermeneutics, highlights the centrality of language this way:

> There is nothing that can be known or understood about either subjects or objects before interpretation or beyond interpretation, outside of a symbolically constituted experience. Or as Gadamer succinctly and memorably put it, "Being that can be understood is language." (p. 22)

Thus in tying curriculum to language (and more generally to symbolically and culturally constituted experience), we are anchoring it firmly in contemporary theories of knowing and being.

A second advantage of treating a curriculum as a conversational domain is that the concept of conversation stretches easily from day-to-day interaction to the longest-standing cultural traditions. We gossip with our neighbors in one conversation, and dialogue with Plato in another. The point is that we are constituting ourselves and our world in both of those conversations, and in the many other conversations that lie between.

A third advantage of treating curriculum as a conversational domain is that conversation is always, by definition, socially and culturally situated: To converse is to take social action. This leads naturally to a consideration of curriculum--and the knowledge represented in curriculum--as socially constituted and culturally situated. To make curricular choices is to make judgments about what is socially and culturally relevant. (It is also to insure that curriculum will become controversial in times of social and cultural change.)

Finally, conversation is by definition dialogic; the topics that are discussed and the knowledge that is constructed are to some degree negotiated by all participants. Thus the domain itself will be to some degree open-ended, allowing the introduction of relevant elements from students' backgrounds and experiences. To specify the domain where the conversation will begin

is not to rule out the wealth of what students and teachers bring with them.

Conversations have a number of characteristics that can help us reformulate how we think about issues of structure and coherence in the curriculum. The first point to note about conversations is that they are constructed by their participants. The meaning that evolves is a meaning that is socially negotiated through the process of conversation itself, guided by shared notions of content and procedures. Taking conversation in its largest sense, this construction of meaning involves readers and writers as well as speakers and listeners. Each text--whether encoded in speech, writing, film, dance, or other arts--is a representation of meaning constructed by its authors and reinterpreted by the other participants. Written texts live long after their authors have left the conversation because this process of reconstrual allows texts to be made relevant in new contexts, by new participants.

The second point is that conversations take place within larger discourse communities; in entering into a conversation, the participants are also entering into the larger community. The rules of discourse within the larger community set boundaries on permissible topics and ways of discussing that may not be immediately apparent in the conversation itself, just as the results of the conversation may have ramifications that echo far beyond its boundaries.

The conversations that are vital and ongoing carry their past with them, but this past is always reconstrued in present terms. New participants are expected to "catch on" more than they are to "catch up"; the pressure of conversation is toward the future even as it is shaped by meanings that have been constructed in its past. This is one of the reasons that a school curriculum that tries to recapitulate the history of a discipline ends up being dull; the bulk of the conversations in such a curriculum are dead before they begin.

The Characteristics of Curriculum

The construction of curriculum, then, becomes the construction of a domain for culturally significant conversations among students, teachers, and texts (taking texts broadly to include cultural artifacts of all sorts, from written documents to works of art to architectural monuments). Such conversations will be framed at the highest level by one or another of our culturally constituted universes of discourse--language, history, literature, science, the arts--that a community at a given point in time wants its students to be able to enter into. The particular substance of the conversational domain will be determined by many different factors, including the maturity and previous experience of the students and the demands of the local community. (The curricular conversation is unlikely to deal seriously with relativity theory in the first grade, nor is it likely in public schools in the United States to deal with Biblical exegesis.)

A conversational domain, like the larger universes of discourse within which it is framed, will consist of elements chosen for study (books, concepts, experiences, performances)--the traditional content of a subject area. It will also consist of a set of culturally constituted ways of thinking and doing within the domain--what counts as evidence and accepted ways of argument within the field of history, for example, or what counts as skilled performance in a physical

education class. These ways of thinking and doing are often tacit or only partially specified, but they are the "basic skills" of learning how to mean.

If we construe curriculum as a conversational domain, we can begin to talk about the features that an engaging and well-orchestrated curriculum will exhibit. H.P. Grice (1975), a philosopher of language, has discussed the logic of conversation in ways that provide a useful framework for thinking about issues of curriculum construction. Grice points out that, ordinarily, in a conversation "each participant recognizes ..., to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. This purpose or direction may be fixed from the start (e.g., by an initial proposal of a question for discussion), or it may evolve during the exchange...." (p. 45). For a conversation to proceed effectively, participants must agree in principle to cooperate with one another--to make their contributions "such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange" (p. 45). This is Grice's Cooperative Principle, and its conditions are essential to a well-constructed curriculum.

There are four broad principles that must be observed if a curriculum is to be cooperative and effective in a Gricean sense.[2] These principles have to do with the quantity, quality, and relatedness of the elements within the curricular domain, and the manner in which the conversation is carried forward. Each of the four will be discussed in turn.

Quantity: The materials included in a curriculum should be as much as is needed but not more than is necessary for the conversation to continue. Violating this maxim results in intellectual impoverishment, either from providing too little material or too much--leading to the breakdown of the conversation itself because the participants have too little to work with or too much to consider to even begin to take action on their own.

In most classrooms, the problems of overload are more common than those of undernourishment. For students, too much coverage quickly reduces a course to an exercise in memorization without the opportunity to take action on their own. For teachers, and more particularly for textbooks, the attempt to cover too much produces a curriculum that is bereft of the focus that should give life to the study of any subject.

Violations of the principle of appropriate quantity are apparent in recent school textbooks across a variety of subject areas. Thus Elliott and Woodward (1990) comment on the problems researchers have noted:

> Chief among the shortcomings researchers have identified are "mentioning," or shallow coverage of a wide range of topics; "inconsiderateness," or poor writing; emphasis on lower-level memorizing of facts and generalizations to the exclusion of problem solving and other higher-order cognitive processes; the avoidance of important topics because

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[2]The four principles that follow derive directly from Grice's four "maxims" whose observance is necessary to insure that the Cooperative Principle is not violated in a conversation. They are recast and clarified here in terms of curricular issues.

some consider them too controversial; and failure to promote adequate understanding of the real nature of knowledge fields, such a science and history, that are the bases of school subjects. (p. 223)

The introductory survey course is particularly ripe for problems of this type, as teachers attempt to provide "sufficient grounding" for students to move on to more advanced work. The very real danger is that the resulting conversation will be so unengaging that when they have a choice in later coursework, students will choose to turn away from the subject altogether.

Quality: Materials to be included in a curriculum need to be worthy of study. At one level, this means that information should be accurate and arguments backed by adequate evidence. This level of quality seems obvious and undebatable, though in fact insuring accurate and up-to-date information is not as simple as it may at first sound. The assumptions underlying significant conversations change with time and circumstance, so that what is accepted as true and accurate may be rejected as distorted in a remarkably short time. To take one well-known example, over the past two decades the portrayal of history, of science, and of literature in the school curriculum has changed substantially in order to reflect the contributions of women and of diverse racial and ethnic groups not previously represented. How the curriculum should be construed in order to effectively reflect those contributions, however, has been a matter of continuing and still-unresolved debate (Minnich, 1990).

At another level, the principle of quality means that material included in a curriculum should have enough depth and substance to be worth studying: Conversations will not proceed very smoothly if there is genuinely little to be said. In the language arts, this is a principle that is easily violated when concerns with making material "relevant" or tailoring the curriculum to students "needs and interests"--both by-words of earlier cycles of educational reform--take precedence over quality. Having a relevant curriculum tailored to students' interests need not mean having a curriculum of low quality materials, but too often in the past that is just what it has meant.

Relatedness: Just as there is a tendency to include too much in a curriculum, there is a tendency to include material that is not integrally related to the ongoing conversation. Most subject areas have a tendency to absorb new materials and emphases without thinking about their relationship to what has already been included, resulting in a hodge podge of unrelated activities rather than a coherent conversation about significant material.

Even when the reasons for adding new elements to the curricular domain are clear and compelling, the principle of relatedness may require a rethinking the shape of the conversation as a whole. Rosenberg (1990), for example, recounts the frustration felt by himself and his class when he first added Jacob's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl to his American literature class at Wabash College, positioned between Melville's "Benito Cereno" and Whitman's poetry. Rather than embracing the new text, the students were unable to fit it into the pattern of conversation they had come to expect. "Following the densely structured and linguistically assured 'Benito Cereno' in the syllabus, Jacobs's book looked simplistic, episodic, uneven, unstructured; presented without any explanatory defense, she didn't have a chance against the major canonical

writers" (p. 136). Rosenberg's students wondered if a slave could have written the book herself; and even if she had, why they should waste their time on an unknown author. In later versions of the curriculum, the conversational domain was redefined to include an examination of the process of canon formation, and of the social and cultural forces that determined which authors were valued and which were not. Only in this context did Jacobs' work begin to feel "cooperative" and the syllabus coherent; in fact Rosenberg notes that students "now generally tell in class and in response papers that they see Jacobs's text as appropriate and even necessary to the course" (p. 145).

Manner: Unlike the other principles, which deal with what is included in a curriculum, the principle of manner relates to the way in which the curriculum is enacted: In particular, the curriculum should be enacted in ways that effectively support students' learning. This in turn requires such characteristics as orderliness, clarity, and the establishment of complementary, mutually supportive roles for teachers, students, materials, and activities. These characteristics are realized through the kinds of instructional scaffolding (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Bruner, 1978; Cazden, 1979), or support for the developing conversation, that teachers orchestrate. Judith Langer and I have explored the nature of effective instructional scaffolding within a broader constructivist pedagogy in a number of papers (e.g., Applebee & Langer, 1983; Langer, 1991; Langer & Applebee, 1986, 1987). In those papers, we have highlighted five features of the curriculum as enacted that are essential to effective teaching and learning: a) Ownership: There must be room for students to take some ownership in any activity in which they engage. They must feel that the meanings they construct have some validity within the curricular conversation. b) Appropriateness: Activities must be neither too hard for students to complete successfully even with help, nor so easy that instruction is unnecessary. c) Structure: Activities must be structured to reflect a natural sequence of thought and language, so that new knowledge and strategies will be learned in relation to appropriate contexts of use. d) Collaboration: Instruction must be collaborative rather than evaluative, providing contexts in which the errors that occur naturally as part of learning become constructive rather than destructive. 5) Transfer of Control: The general pattern of instruction must allow for a transfer of control to the students as they internalize new knowledge and strategies. As students gain new skills, they must have opportunities to utilize them in responsible ways.

Another way to understand the principles underlying a well-constructed curriculum is to consider what happens when they are violated. Violations of the principles are likely to lead to reactions of the following sorts (Beaugrande, 1980):

> Big deal! [quantity]
> But that's not true! [quality]
> So what? [relatedness]
> I don't know what you are talking about. [manner]

Such reactions are familiar enough in the context of instruction, when the curriculum or the textbook is not well constructed. While such expressions can be interpreted as a lack of engagement, it may be helpful to recognize that such disengagement may be caused in part by the curriculum itself.

Open versus Closed Conversations

There are a variety of roles that participants in a conversation can take, depending upon such factors as their status relationships, particular expertise, and experience related to the topic. When participants have equal status and expertise, the direction that conversation takes can be said to be open. Topics that are discussed and conclusions that are reached will be negotiated among the participants, subject to general constraints on relevance and grounds for argument within a particular field of discourse. In contrast, when one participant has higher status or expertise, the conversation is likely to be relatively closed. What is discussed and how it is discussed will be dominated by the higher status participant; others will be relegated to acquiescing to the conclusions that are reached. It is important to note that both open and closed conversations are governed by the general constraints of the particular universe of discourse within which the conversation occurs; what varies is the extent to which the conversation is dialogic or monologic.

Traditional classrooms have tended to be organized around closed conversations, in which the emphasis is on being sure that the lower status participants (the students) gain the knowledge held by high-status participants (teacher, text, and cultural tradition). Such conversations are ritualistic in form, with the roles and forms of participation sharply defined and sharply limited: Teachers present knowledge, ask questions, direct discussion, and evaluate learning, while students answer questions, practice skills, and display their learning. The highly-predictable structure of the resulting classroom talk has been thoroughly detailed by Mehan (1979) and others (Cazden, 1986; Marshall, 1989).

When classrooms are organized around more open conversations, the patterns of participation change. All participants can present evidence, ask questions, or evaluate the relevance of someone else's contribution. Students will talk with one another, as well as with the teacher, and their contributions will be treated as enriching, rather than derailing, the conversation. The teacher will continue to be central, but the teacher's role will change from ritualistic to mentoring. Like the master artisan, the teacher will structure the classroom conversations so that they simultaneously engage the participants in real tasks that are themselves situated as part of a larger cultural conversation. Addressing those tasks, the class will be learning both the immediate content and the conventions and rules of use of the larger governing context. (For discussion of patterns of interaction in such classrooms, see Langer, 1991; Roberts & Langer, 1991.)

Curriculum Structure

Curricular conversations differ from spontaneous conversations in that they are meant to be pedagogical. In creating a curriculum, we are creating a domain for conversation, a space that is itself situated within a larger cultural conversation. The curricular space, or framework, will mark certain topics or activities as most relevant to the intended conversation, and will reflect a more or less explicit set of relationships among curricular elements. Because conversations that

develop within the curricular space are students' principal means of learning to enter successfully into culturally significant domains of meaning and doing, the way we structure the curricular space--the elements that are included and the relationships that are or can be established among them--will shape the kinds of conceptualizations students develop, the ways in which the particular domain hangs together or falls apart for them.

Culturally significant conversations progressively explore topics within socially constituted domains of meaning and doing (e.g., literature, the arts, science, history, mathematics). A curriculum, as a pedagogical tool, provides a domain for apprenticeship within such a conversation. The meanings that the participants construct in the course of the curricular conversation will constitute their understanding of the larger domain. This understanding will be partial and incomplete in comparison with the understanding of the experienced participant in the conversation, but it will grow and develop as participation continues.

Curricular structure exists at several different levels. To use a common distinction, there is the formal curriculum as represented in textbooks or official curriculum guidelines, the enacted curriculum, which represents the transformations that take place in the teachers' and students' interactions around the formal curriculum, and the received curriculum, which reflects how students make sense of the curricular conversations in which they are engaged. Different structures may exist at each of these levels, structures which may be more or less supportive of conversations in a constructivist sense.

In thinking about curricular structure, there are two basic sets of structural relationships that occur among elements in the curricular domain. The first is the establishment of a curricular focus or center, to which all other elements of the curricular domain are related. The center of the domain can be very concrete: The center of a handwriting curriculum, for example, may be a set of particular written representations of the 26 capital and lowercase letters. The center may also be abstract and conceptual, as in a literature curriculum centered around the notion that a literary work is the realization of social and cultural conditions at a particular place in time. Once a center or focus has been established, one can make judgments about what material is more central and what less central to the conversational domain--and to rule other things out as simply irrelevant.

The second basic structuring device is the establishment of relationships between individual elements within the domain, which can stretch out eventually into lengthy "chains" of related material. The relationships can take many different forms, from concrete and perceptual to abstract and conceptual; they include such familiar structuring devices as chronology, taxonomy, causality, similarity, difference, and complementarity. The particular types of relationships that structure a conversational domain will vary from subject to subject, though all are available to be drawn upon.

The principles of centering and relating underlie a wide variety of different curriculum structures, some of which by virtue of their structure are more supportive of the construction of meaning than are others. A few common structures are discussed below. These structures are rarifications rather than mutually exclusive alternatives. A real curriculum may end up with a

structure that incorporates several of these types, but as rarifications they help us understand some of the alternatives and the implications of emphasizing one or another of them.

Catalog. The simplest structure for the curriculum is a catalog of items within the domain, with no links among the elements of the curriculum beyond their domain membership. Such a curriculum has no real center, only a diffuse and unspecified sense of a domain. This kind of structure is surprisingly prevalent, particularly in the area of skills instruction. In the language arts, for example, there is often a separate curriculum of weekly spelling or vocabulary words, in which the only structuring principle is likely to be one of frequency or difficulty (less frequent or more difficult words being introduced later in the curriculum). E.D. Hirsch's (1987) recent delineation of knowledge necessary for cultural literacy represent a similar catalog, in its lengthy alphabetical lists of terms that students should know.

L.S. Vygotsky (1962), examining the development of conceptual understanding, has termed such structures "heaps," noting that there are no conceptual links among the elements. Lacking such links, the domain itself remains indeterminate. Such curricula cannot sustain conversation, remaining inexorably at the level of memorization and recitation detached from meaningful context. Teachers may struggle to make such practice meaningful, but the structure of the curriculum itself militates against success.

Catalogs are also frequently used to organize larger units of coursework, most notably at the college level. Like the catalog structure of a single course of study, the catalog organization of sets of courses frustrates attempts at broader conversations. While individual courses may be challenging and rewarding, links across them are at best fortuitous. These drawbacks are apparent in the various supplementary mechanisms that are usually superimposed on catalogs: prerequisites, general education requirements, major requirements, comprehensive examinations, and formal systems of advising students about what to take.

Collection. The collection is the type of curricular structure that evolves from identifying a center or focus (Great Books, Modes of Discourse, Systems of the Body), and choosing elements to explore based on a sense of "set-ness." (Vygotsky uses the example of knife, fork, and spoon, bound together as a set by their complementary functions in everyday life.) With some relatively well defined topics (for example, Modes of Discourse) the result over a period of time may be relatively taxonomic, particularly if the exploration remains at a high enough level of abstraction (narration, description, argument, and poetry, for example, rather than the virtually infinite uses of language). For other topics (e.g., Great Books), the result is likely to be more of a sampler than a taxonomy.

The collection curriculum provides limited possibilities for conversation and the development of meaning. Explorations of links among the elements of the curriculum will be fortuitous rather than expected, since the elements are chosen to complete the collection, rather than because they reflect a more abstract structure or because of relationships that are perceived among them. A formal curriculum that is no more than a collection may of course be transformed by teacher and students as they construct relationships and impose a coherence that may be more fully developed than those that guided the initial construction of the formal curriculum.

The collection is a very common curriculum structure in American schools. Literature courses through grade 10 are typically organized by themes or genres which are "sampled" in isolation as part of a set of types of literature rather than being related one to another. Writing courses are typically organized around types of discourse, each of which is explored separately before moving on to another part of the domain. Geography courses are organized around the major continents, each visited in turn.

Sequential. The major organizing device discussed so far has involved the establishing of a center and selecting curricular elements in relation to it. The other major structural device involves the imposition of relationships between elements within the domain, rather than between each element and an organizing focus or center. The simplest such relationship is the establishment of sequence: B follows A, C follows B, and D follows C. Sequence takes many forms, but the two most frequent in curriculum planning are chronology and hierarchy (e.g., of difficulty, complexity, or value).

In the simplest versions of sequentially organized curricula, the notion of sequence provides the only organizing principle. Works in a literature class are sequenced by the dates they were written, the kings and queens of England are studied in the order of their reigns. Sequence can also be hierarchical, as in composition curricula that move from the study of sentences to paragraphs and finally to whole essays, or in social studies courses that move from the family to the community to the nation.

The purely sequential curriculum, like the catalog, offers little room for conversation to develop. The elements sit in a fixed and relatively narrow relationship to one another, with little room to construct further meanings within the terms of the organization chosen. Such curricula are a relatively common byproduct of an atomistic approach to curriculum planning, resulting in well-sequenced scope and sequence charts which in seeking to insure that the right elements are included allow the sequencing principle to usurp any other focus. Examples of such curricula can be drawn from the history of most disciplines. Thus Charles Cleveland's A Compendium of English literature, widely used in the U.S. during the 19th century, asked such questions as "What is [Milton's] first poetical work, and what its subject? What the second? Third?...Tenth?" (Applebee, 1974, p. 11).

Episodic. When a conversational center is added to a sequential curricular domain, it becomes episodic. In the episodic curriculum, the elements are both ordered with respect to each other and related to a central idea or focus. Conversations about chronologically organized literary texts, for example, may have a focus on literature as a reflection of its time. In such a course, each episode will provide a new opportunity for participants to deepen their understanding of the domain. As conversations develop within an episodic curricular space, students learn more about the topic, enrichening and deepening their understanding. The episodic curriculum remains limited, however, in that the different episodes are chosen to cast light on the central topic but not on one another: The activities in the last episode are not structurally related to those in the first; the structure that is present invites affirmation rather than reconstrual and reassessment.

The episodic curriculum is quite prevalent in American schools. It is easy to plan and teach, since each episode or segment flows logically from the previous ones yet remains self contained; once the sequence is acknowledged, new episodes can be taken up and set aside without a great deal of attention to other episodes. Chronologically organized courses in history, art, and literature often take on an episodic structure, as the course turns from one period to the next without raising questions that cut across periods (e.g., the issue of periodicity itself).

Integrated. The last curricular structure that I want to discuss adds to the episodic curriculum a sense of interrelatedness among the elements of the domain. Simple sequence is replaced by more substantive relationships such as causality or systematicity. As new elements enter into the conversation, they provide not only new contexts for exploring the established focus, but new perspectives on other elements in the conversation, and on the focus itself. Here, the conversation is real and comprehensive, involving a process of continuing reconstrual not only of what has just been introduced, but, in light of new ideas, everything that has come before.

Integration of this sort requires that the curriculum be made up of independent but interacting elements. On the level of a unit, it can occur, for example, when students read case materials about an event in history, out of which they have to develop their own analyses and interpretations about what happened and why. In the language arts, it may occur as students contrast the voices of Native Americans with those of European colonists in exploring the literature of the colonial era, or read a cross-cultural collection of stories illuminating culturally-different assumptions about the relationships among old age, wisdom, and respect.

Milanes (1992) has described students' growing understanding of institutionalized racism in the United States while participating in a course that offered a much richer variety of texts than they were used to, including many by women, by African American authors, and by Latin American authors. As she described it, students' understanding of the issues "came, not suddenly, but as a result of dealing with the issue (and other related isues) over the semester: reading works treating it, writing about it, and talking about it with others" (p. 253). Though such a course must begin somewhere, books and ideas introduced early will be continually reconstrued as new ideas are encountered. As the course continues, participants will construct a shared representation of the curricular domain, and may very well redefine the focus with which they began.

It is worth pointing out that integration in the sense discussed here goes much further than the kind of integration that is commonly advocated for language arts instruction. Integrated language arts usually refers to a curriculum in which the various types of language use (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and skill practice are related to one another, often by using thematic units which allow a range of activities to be related to the common theme. Integration at this level is a prerequisite for an integrated curriculum structure, but it is not sufficient. True integration requires real grounds for conversation and reconstrual as the curriculum evolves. Many thematic units are too shallow for such reconstrual, no matter how carefully the various language arts are integrated into them. The result is that while language activities may all emphasize a common topic, the activities are not drawn from a coherent conversational domain.

Recursiveness

The curricular structures outlined above can operate on a variety of different levels. In my discussion so far, I have focused mostly at the level of the "course," but the same conceptualization can be applied to the internal structure of "units" or "lessons," and recursively to the ways these smaller units are linked together into larger wholes. (Just as the most integrated advanced seminar is likely to be linked to other courses through a catalog.)

Voices in the Conversation

Curricular conversations are made up of many different voices. Some belong to the members of an individual classroom. Some are more distant, belonging to other people who have engaged in discussions of similar issues, and whose collective contribution constitutes the legacy of cultural knowledge reflected in textbooks or in selections chosen for study. Some are hidden "between the lines" of the conversation, reflecting the multiple and sometimes conflicting layers of meaning that emerge when a text is "deconstructed." In planning a curriculum, the teacher orchestrates these layers of voices, highlighting those that will be central to the conversation at a given point in time, and ignoring others.

Implicit in the concept of curricular conversations is the notion that students will be given materials that themselves have voice and structure. It is not clear that this is presently the case. Textbooks are differentiated so sharply by subject area that generic discussions of them are of little value: They range from drill and practice exercises (typing, grammar) to encyclopedic accounts (history, social studies) to source materials accompanied by commentary (literature). Of all of these, only the literature anthology offers independent voices to join the conversation, and then only if the instructional apparatus that accompanies the typical anthology is ignored (Applebee, 1991). If we want seriously to conceive of a constructivist curriculum, one that is built around significant conversations, then we need more case books that pose real problems, using materials that speak in real voices, and fewer encyclopedic surveys in which once-meaningful conversations have been distilled into an uninviting and uncontroversial tome.

Conversations often gain interest and liveliness when disagreements among the voices are real. The nature of these contrasts will differ from discipline to discipline: They may involve the pairing of literature of the Puritans with that of Native Americans in studying American literature; contrasting the party platforms offered by the Democrats and the Republicans during an election year as part of an analysis of contemporary American history; or pitting "Big Bang" theories of the universe against their alternatives in an astronomy course. Such disagreements create contexts for learning how to evaluate conflicting arguments, as well as how to muster evidence and defend one's own opinions within a particular universe of discourse.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum in the ways I have been describing it provides a conversational space within

which students can engage with new subject matter. The dimensions of that space are important as a reflection of the larger culturally-constituted domain of knowing and doing. The curriculum will be a reification or simplification of the larger discourse, not a reproduction of the domain in all of its depth and complexity.

The elements of the curriculum provide the space for conversation to develop, but they are not in themselves enough. For the curriculum to be effective, it requires a constructivist pedagogy, one in which the roles of the teacher and learner are transformed to support the construction of meaning, rather than the transmission of knowledge. It is ultimately the teacher in the day-to-day interaction with students who teaches students how to converse-- both how to participate in the conversation, and what counts as appropriate to talk about. (See for example Langer's [1991] analyses of how effective literature instruction involves teachers' scaffolding both ways to think and ways to discuss.) It is here that curriculum and instruction do come together in a constructivist pedagogy that offers a real alternative to the traditional ways of knowing and doing in our schools.

Rather than abandoning issues of curriculum, as the English Coalition Conference seemed inclined to do, we must develop new ways to talk about curriculum that will further rather than frustrate our attempts to implement a constructivist pedagogy. This is true whatever our own routes to a constructivist pedagogy may be, whether through a renewal of Deweyian progressivism, an extension of critical theory to generate a critical pedagogy, an outgrowth of cognitive science, or an application of Vygotskian analyses of language and learning. Reconstruing curriculum as a domain for culturally significant conversations is a first step in that process.

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